

TESTIMONY OF JANET STOLFI ALFANO, MSW
Appropriations Committee
February 18, 2009

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Janet Stolfi Alfano, and I am the Operations Manager at The Diaper Bank. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you this evening.

I am here to speak in support of funding for The Diaper Bank, which was cut from the budget of the Department of Children and Families in the Governor's proposed budget.

The money, \$150,000 per year, came through the Bureau of Prevention in the Department of DCF because Connecticut legislators recognized that providing access to such a basic need like diapers, keeps babies healthy in many ways: reducing the incidence of diaper rash, reducing the risk of abuse, and increasing access to day care and school readiness opportunities. These vital preventative measures save the State of Connecticut thousands of dollars in future health related costs associated with the treatment of dermatitis, urinary tract infections and other serious health outcomes related to infrequent diaper changing.

'The mission of the Department of Children and Families is to protect children, improve child and family well-being and support and preserve families. We believe that providing a basic need, such as diapers, speaks directly to the core mission of the Department of Children and Families.

We need to spend money on prevention of problems in order to save money later on- we all know that children thrive when they are well cared for, babies need diapers. They need to have their diapers changed when they are wet or dirty, not when mom or dad can afford another diaper.

The Diaper Bank (TDB) centralizes the fundraising and distribution of free diapers to poor families through existing service providers, including local food pantries, soup kitchens, daycare centers, social service agencies and shelters. Through its extensive Diaper Distribution Network (DDN) of more than 50 agencies, TDB provides over 200,000 free diapers monthly to poor and low-income families in New Haven, Bridgeport, and Hartford.

Agencies must apply for membership into our Diaper Distribution Network. In order for an agency to be accepted,

1. It must be registered as a 501©3 organization or be a church in good standing
2. At least 51% of the population that the agency serves must be at or below 100% of the Federal Poverty Level. (2009 level \$22,050 for a family of four)
3. The Diaper Bank Program Manager also conducts a site visit to ensure that the agency has a secure space to store the diapers before they are accepted into the Diaper Distribution Network.

Our agencies are required to report monthly on the number of diapers distributed, the number of children and families served, and provide some basic information about the families. The agencies go through an orientation and receive a manual as to the policies and procedures.

We know that it is not a small task for our agency members to distribute diapers. We have the reporting requirements in place because it allows us to track our diaper inventory very closely. We do this with 2 paid staff, an active board of directors, and a dedicated core of volunteers, which allows us to keep our administrative costs so low.

We received the \$150,000 to distribute diapers because of our experience and efficiency in distribution and our model of collaboration with existing service providers. It is what enables us to get diapers to as many children as we do.

\$150,000 buys 50 diapers per month for 250 children. Losing \$150, 000 will lead us to give diapers to 250 less children per month. It will lead the agencies we work with to have to choose which of their very needy clients are the neediest. We have already had to ask our agencies to cut down on the number of diapers they give out. Originally, we gave as many diapers as a family needed, then 100 diapers a month and now we are at 50 diapers a month. Even with that, we cannot meet the need that exists. We only give diapers to families who are served by agencies in New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport. The need is huge and we have only begun to meet it.

Our clients are in great need. The costs of not providing these vital services are greater. One of our agencies reported that a mother was arrested for stealing diapers from a local store. That arrest cost the state of Connecticut in so many different ways. If she serves jail time, she will cost the state of Connecticut \$121 each day. If her children are taken away from her due to her incarceration, it will cost the state of Connecticut in costs associated with short term placement, foster care, and child care. However, most importantly, it will cost the health and well-being of our children and their families.

Many of our clients are receiving services from other organizations represented here today. Our partnership with these organizations is what allows us to reach as many children as we do. Our clients will be most hard hit from the cuts that the Governor is proposing, from cuts to services, increases in fees and copayments, to elimination of the agencies and commissions that advocate on their behalf.

We know that the demand for these vital services is growing and will continue to increase with the current economic crisis. Without our help and the help of the many organizations servicing our community, our most vulnerable state residents will suffer.

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